

Dear VDGIF Constituents:

This letter is an effort to expand communications with our constituents. We hope to use this format as a way to reach individuals visiting our Web site and encourage you to share the content with other sportsmen.

The proposed license fee increase has generated discussion of issues that need clarification and we'd like to do that in this letter. It has been noted that hunting and fishing license fees have not been increased in Virginia since 1988. Some have questioned waiting for such a long period of time to adjust for inflation and the increased costs of doing business. Until 2004, the authority to set license fees was with the General Assembly. In 2004, that authority was delegated by the Legislature and the Governor to the Board of Game and Inland Fisheries. However, restrictions came with that authority. License fees can only be increased by a maximum of \$5.00, including non-resident license fees. And, license fee increases are allowed only once in a three-year period. Many people raised concerns during the comment period that the increase could negatively impact participation by young people. The Board has not proposed any increase in any youth license.

If the Board approves the license fee increase as proposed, it would go into effect on July 1, 2006. That day also will be the day that the Department's license sales system will become fully automated. Several benefits to sportsmen come with full automation. Legislation enacted several years ago allowed the Board to establish a Sportsmen's License when the Department converted to the automated system. Beginning July 1, 2006, hunters and anglers may elect to purchase a Sportsmen's License with multiple hunting and fishing privileges on one license, thereby eliminating the need to carry multiple licenses when in the field. Also with full implementation, on July 1, 2006, licenses will be valid for one year from the date of purchase. For example, if you purchase your license on October 30, 2006, it will be valid through October 29, 2007.

An issue that frequently came up in public comments on the proposed license fee increase was Sunday hunting. It should be clearly stated that Sunday hunting is an issue controlled by the General Assembly and not by the Board of Game and Inland Fisheries. For several past sessions of the General Assembly, Sunday hunting received considerable attention by Legislators. After discussion, the Legislature chose not to legalize Sunday hunting in Virginia, except in certain situations such as hunting preserves. VDGIF has always, during these discussions, put forward our understanding that Sunday hunting would have no adverse biological impact on wildlife in Virginia. Therefore, VDGIF has always taken the position before the Legislative committees that Sunday hunting is a social issue. Our latest survey data regarding Sunday hunting, which is more than five years old, indicates that 53% of the general public was either strongly opposed or somewhat opposed to Sunday hunting. Of Virginia hunters, 52% were either strongly opposed or moderately opposed to Sunday hunting. Further, 78% of Virginia's

landowners were opposed to hunting on Sunday. We understand that some of our constituents feel strongly about this issue and VDGIF will continue to gather from Virginia's hunters, citizens and landowners their feelings on this matter. However, responsibility for addressing Sunday hunting rests with the General Assembly.

We would like to provide clarification on another topic that seems to create confusion regarding state parks and wildlife management areas. State parks are operated by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Fees are charged to users of these facilities and hunting is carefully controlled or not allowed at all. On the other hand, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries owns and manages wildlife management areas (WMAs). WMAs were purchased primarily, if not entirely, with hunting and fishing license dollars and with federal matching funds. Their principal use has always been for hunting and fishing related activities. Other secondary uses are permitted. At this time access fees are not charged. Fundamentally, WMAs are managed for wildlife habitat conservation as opposed to state parks which are managed for recreation such as picnicking, camping, swimming, and so forth.

As the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries works to carry out its mission – to manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish, to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting, and fishing – the Department clearly faces difficult times ahead as maintaining funding levels from hunting and fishing licenses becomes more challenging. This dilemma is not unique to Virginia. Many wildlife agencies across our nation are facing similar funding issues. In recent months, the staff and the Board of Game and Inland Fisheries have been taking a comprehensive look at the Department's finances and at alternatives available for future funding. We've also adopted measures to reduce expenses. Being good stewards of the monies coming to the agency is first and foremost. We are committed to insuring sportsmen's dollars are wisely and appropriately spent.

If you have any questions or comments please feel free to contact the Director's Office. You can reach us by simply clicking on this link and [send an email](#).

Sincerely,

Sherry Smith Crumley
Board Chairman

Sincerely,

Colonel W. Gerald Massengill
Interim Director